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From: Skahen, Mary (EHS) <mary.skahen@massmail.state.ma.us>
Sent: Thursday, January 26, 2012 3:46 PM
To: Hanchett, James (DPH)
Subject: A Message from Secretary Bigby re: Strengthening Services for Children and Families

Dear EOHHS Staff:

Every day, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts serves thousands of children and their families through a diverse array of Children, Youth, and Family (CYF) services. These services support some of the most vulnerable populations in the state— individuals and families who turn to state agencies as a result of child abuse or neglect, abandonment, delinquency, poverty, mental illness, substance abuse, disability, or other special needs.

While the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Youth Services provide many of these programs, children are served by a number of other agencies, including the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Developmental Services, MassHealth, the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Housing and Economic Development, and other government agencies, provider partners and education entities.

Massachusetts has long been a national leader in providing children, youth and families with vital, high-quality services to improve their lives and facilitate success. Our agencies and community partners help make a positive difference in the lives of the families and children we serve. The challenges our families face are complex, and the Commonwealth is committed to working more collaboratively across state government and with families in order to be more responsive to the diverse needs of children. Working across state government, we at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) must continue to think critically about the evolving needs of families and how we can better serve children and families to achieve better outcomes.

Why Reform the CYF System?

Families have shared with us the need for a family-centric service delivery model that serves the whole child and family in a well-coordinated and effective manner, ensuring access to the right services at the right time. The current CYF system is fragmented and places an unintentional burden on the individuals and families we serve, many of whom must navigate among multiple government agencies to identify and obtain services.

In response to families' expressed need for more coordinated services and in recognition of the importance of a more holistic system, EOHHS and the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee have taken a careful look at the way we deliver services for children, youth, and families in Massachusetts.

We recognize that there are complexities in today's system that may impede families from identifying, accessing, understanding, and successfully receiving services. Multiple doors, multiple service plans, and multiple approaches for addressing a family's needs can be confusing and frustrating. We believe we have an opportunity to improve families' access to information and services, their overall experiences, and the way in which we, as a network of practitioners, understand and address families' diverse needs in a holistic and well-coordinated manner.

Enabling Success for Massachusetts' Children, Youth and Families

EOHHS seeks to transform Massachusetts' system to a strengths-based, family-centric model that serves the whole child and family. This effort is not about a merger of state agencies. Nor is this effort a budget saving exercise: we fully expect that any realized savings will be reinvested in meeting the needs of children and their families. It is solely about strengthening services and supports for children and families. We are committed to taking the Commonwealth's system from good to great.

Massachusetts' network of CYF service providers needs to transform to a culture that focuses on the only measure that matters: the healthy development of our children, youth and families. We need to talk more often and openly about what our families need, and use community partnerships to meet those needs. This change in culture is not easy, but is critically important.

The major recommendations from the CYF Advisory Committee include:

- Improving access to information and resources and simplifying families' interactions with the system;
- Streamlining eligibility processes;

- Coordinating services and plans across CYF programs;
- Strengthening coordination across the education system and CYF services;
- Optimizing joint local, state and federal funding;
- Ensuring workforce competency; and
- Investing in proven services as measured by performance outcomes and reporting.

The CYF Advisory Committee's report, *Recommendations for Strengthening Children, Youth, and Family Services in Massachusetts*, was submitted to Governor Patrick earlier this month. The report can be accessed at the following website: <http://www.mass.gov/hhs/childservices>.

What Does This Mean for CYF Stakeholders?

Reforming the CYF system is a significant undertaking that will require years of collaborative effort, investment, and commitment across state government and among our partners. Like any complex change, this work will take a great deal of careful thought and close coordination with our partners in the family, provider, and advocate communities, among many others. We are committed to transforming our service delivery system, because Massachusetts children, youth, and families deserve and expect it. We ask for your active support and involvement in this effort.

We owe it to the Commonwealth's children and families to develop a more collaborative and integrative system of care for families, and we cannot afford to wait to start this important work. The work starts now. All of us need to work together and remember our ultimate focus: It's all about the children!

Sincerely,

JudyAnn Bigby, M.D.

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